

It's time for Springs residents to start healing process

By Richard Skorman

For the better part of the last four years, Colorado Springs has been sinking into the muck surrounding the passage of Amendment 2. At times, the battle has turned nasty. Name-calling, graffiti, business boycotts, angry bumper stickers, vandalism and hateful letters to the editor were common from both sides.irate AIDS activists threw condoms in a church. Angry bigots assaulted patrons in gay bar parking lots.

Meanwhile, most in Colorado Springs have grown tired of the whole issue. That's why the timing of Ground Zero's "A Time To Mend" campaign couldn't be better. No matter what the Supreme Court decides on the constitutionality of Amendment 2, Ground Zero has called for a moratorium on all boy cotts and all gay or anti-gay statewide ballot initiatives. They urge all of us to reach out to one another "to restore balance and reason" in Colorado Springs.

I, for one, had been part of the "im-balance." Less than a year before the Amendment 2 campaign, my best friend

of 20 years, Steven, died in my arms of AIDS. When Amendment 2 passed, I was deeply hurt. I couldn't stop thinking of what Steven and millions of others have had to endure growing up gay in this country. My hurt quickly turned to anger. I blamed everyone who voted for Amendment 2 for their prejudice or ignorance. I quickly labeled Colorado for Family Values and all of their supporters as "the enemy." During national media interviews, I would complain about how intolerant Colorado Springs had become.

I wasn't the only angry one. Some in our community traveled across America warning about a "radical gay agenda to recruit children" and touting a few examples of extreme behavior as representing all gays and lesbians. Colorado Springs quickly earned a national reputation as a center for anti-gay political extremists.

Others in our community promoted Colorado Springs as "the epicenter of hate" and "the city of intolerance." They helped focus an angry boycott on

Colorado and helped foster negative national media stories that painted our city in the broadest of strokes.

Four years of culture wars over gay rights helped bring about serious divisions in our city. Some in our community who cried out against homophobia and intolerance unfairly branded conservative Christians or libertarians as bigots. Others who campaigned hard against any affirmation of homosexuality helped perpetuate fear-producing and dehumanizing stereotypes in the process.

But at Citizens Project, we agree that it's time to stop the blaming. Yes, we will continue to support the equal rights of every member of our community, no matter what sexual orientation, race or religion that person may be. But we enthusiastically support dialogue programs such as Food For Thought where local citizens of differing value systems can open up dialogue with one another. And we wholeheartedly welcome Ground Zero's "A Time to Mend" campaign.

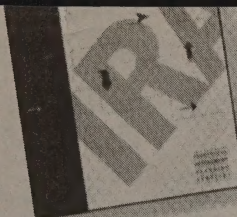
Citizens Project Board member Greg Walta expressed it well when he said "it is time for this town to restore civility to local public discourse and to turn our attention to other important issues." Most of us, whether socially conservative or moderate, will continue to make Colorado Springs our home. We culture war veterans need to let go of our anger and give the issue a rest. If we can, wouldn't it be nice to see Will Perkins munching on a slice of pizza at Poor Richard's restaurant sometime in the future? And yes, when shopping for my next mini-van, I might someday stop by his Motor City showroom to compare prices.

Skorman is the board chairman of Citizens Project. Forum is open to readers who have expertise or personal experience in an area of public policy. Articles should be about 750 words in length and can be sent to: GT Forum, Gazette Telegraph, P.O. Box 1779, Colorado Springs, CO 80901.

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